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ABSTRACT

To fully understand and appreciate urban colleges and universities, it is essential to be aware of and sensitive to the urban environment. The urban university shares both the advantages and the problems of its surrounding city. The cultural institutions and the diverse population of the city are invaluable resources which, inevitably, embody aspects of the problems and challenges confronting urban areas. In spite of these links, little is known about the nature of the exchange between the urban college or university and its environment. Relevant questions touch on (1) the general nature of the urban environment, especially as it influences the university; (2) the areas of the urban environment that are relevant to higher education and are affected by it; (3) the pattern of the relationships between the university and its environment; (4) the impact of the various relationships on the university; and (5) the impact and influences of the relationships, activities, and programs on the urban environment. In Detroit, Michigan, answers to these questions might be most effectively formulated through the development of a consortium of Detroit's institutions of higher education and cultural institutions that can work for the benefit of the entire community, and allow for the development of new dimensions in learning. (CMG)

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CITIES, UNIVERSITIES, AND CIVILIZATION

by

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This paper discusses the special characteristics of urban universities and colleges, identifies some basic questions about the relationship of these institutions to their urban environment, and proposes a Detroit consortium to link its educational and cultural institutions more effectively with their particular urban environment.

The following brief discussion of the urban university, with special attention to Detroit, grew out of a workshop on urban higher education held at the University of Michigan several years ago. That workshop stimulated the drafting of a position paper. "The Academic Organization and The Urban Environment," to which various colleagues contributed ideas and perspectives. These are reflected in the ensuing pages.

Urban & Suburban

Most European universities were founded in urban areas: in Paris in the twelfth century, in Prague and Vienna in the fourteenth century, in Leiden in the sixteenth century, and in Moscow in the eighteenth century. When colleges were established in the United States in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, it was, with few exceptions, in rather rural environs. Until relatively recently, many of our major institutions have remained somewhat sequestered, away from the mainstream of bustling human activity. This may be a vestige of our British heritage; Oxford was a quaint, rural retreat where in the nineteenth century, Matthew Arnold and Arthur Clough used to go to escape from the frustrations of London city life.

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Many of American's great universities remain, if not rural, then suburban -- near but removed from a great city. And the distance is not merely geographical. Harvard in Cambridge is viewed differently from Boston University; the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor is viewed differently from Wayne State University in Detroit; the University of Texas in Austin is viewed differently from the University of Houston.

The differences between these pairs of schools suggest the differences between major institutions located within and removed from the major centers of our population.

It is absolutely critical to be aware of and sensitive to the urban environment if one is fully to understand and appreciate urban colleges and universities. Both the city and the university are faced with monumental problems, and their problems are not unrelated.

The urban university shares both the advantages and problems of its surrounding city. Cities are the repositories for major concentrations of civilization's accumulated cultural assets. Major museums, theaters, orchestras, and cultural organizations are located there. The people of an urban area constitute a microcosm of the larger society, with concentrations of people from many backgrounds and of many types all living within a relatively limited geographical area. The cultural institutions and the diverse population of the city are invaluable resources. They also, inevitably, embody aspects of the problems and challenges which confront urban areas.

The urban crisis is well documented and so is the financial problem confronting urban higher education. Solutions to these problems are not readily apparent, however. Research on the functioning of the academic organization is developing but not developed. Even less is known about the nature of the exchange between the interdependence of the city and university.

The study of university management and organization too often stresses internal process and "measures" or "models" and neglects the impact of the environment and the interaction between, and interdependence of, the organization and its environment. There are exceptions, but all often emphasis has been placed on the internal functioning of the organization. Such a view of a closed system does not aid our understanding of current issues in urban higher education. We cannot fully understand the urban university without understanding the factors which impinge upon it.

At one level of inquiry, a relevant question is: What kind of organization can survive and be effective in a particular environment? More specifically, what kind of organization is characteristic of urban colleges? The supposition is that colleges in different types of environments will exhibit different patterns of organization and activity. And further, even if they share a similar urban environment, different types of colleges (liberal arts vs. community colleges, public vs. private) may manifest different relationships to the city. Within any one urban environment, colleges manifest different kinds and degrees of association with different elements of the city. There is a distinction between the "urban university or college" and the "college in the urban setting." The former is urban-based by tradition, choice, pressure, or accident, and serves intensively the populace of the city with its particular requirements and needs. The latter is coincidentally located in the city and makes little effort specifically and directly to meet the needs of its immediate area.

Some Basic Questions

What are the implications for urban universities, for their environment, and for their interaction with the city?

1. What is the general nature of the urban environment, particularly as it influences the academic organization? What are the relevant dimensions of the urban environment and how can they be characterized and related to the university?

2. More specifically, what are the relevant parts of the environment affecting higher education and affected by it? What is the "set" or the "task environment" of the academic organization? How does it vary with the type of college?

3. What are the patterns of relationships between the colleges and universities and their immediate environment? What structures and processes in the institutions and in the environment are associated with various patterns? What are the potential relationships yet to be realized? What are the implications of potential but nonexistent linkages?

4. What is the impact of the various relationships on the college or university? What changes do new inputs and activities make within the organization?

5. What are the impacts and influences of the relationships, activities, and programs on the surrounding environment?

A Detroit Consortium

If these five questions are legitimate lines of inquiry for a better understanding of urban higher education, I would advocate that their answers might be most effectively formulated through the development of a consortium involving not only institutions of higher education but a broad range of organizations and agencies that shape and respond to urban life.

Urban universities are faced with a special problem: how to extend and expand the opportunities they offer to their students and to the entire city. This, of course, does not mean solely a physical expansion, but rather an expansion of the potential of their educational research and service activities. Urban universities and colleges must try to exert influence not only on the lives of their students but more widely on the life of the city. Among other things, they serve as a model for the human and cultural dimensions of the city.

The city of Detroit, for instance, has an opportunity to bring together a variety of educational and cultural institutions, both public and private, into a consortium of teaching, service, and research that will enhance the entire community. These include, in addition to colleges and universities, such resources as the Detroit Institute of Arts, the Detroit Public Library, Detroit Symphony, Historical Museum, Science Center, and Afro-American Museum. All these institutions have much to offer and they are presently doing a great deal. Unfortunately, they do so in relative isolation from each other and, in some respects, even in competition with one another. Were the city of Detroit to take leadership in efforts to coordinate their offerings intended for the benefit of the community, these efforts could become both more effective and more comprehensive.

Consideration must be given to allowing students to select courses and programs offered at institutions other than their own and to receive credit at graduation from their own home institutions. Consideration should be given to pooling, to whatever extent possible, the faculty of the consortium, perhaps within joint educational programs, to obtain the best use of the financial resources available to all the institutions, a consideration of increased importance because of the effects of the lack of resources. More

important, this would allow the development of new dimensions in learning as part of the new dimension in living that is being achieved by Detroit's renaissance.

The consortium should make assistance to the public schools system one of its high priorities. The school system and its successes affect the decisions people make about whether they want to live in Detroit, and those decisions are fundamental to the city's future. Detroit's institutions of higher education should be concerned with the problems of the public schools as a matter of enlightened self-interest. The goal should be nothing less than to make Detroit's public schools a model for the nation.

Detroit is now in a period of redevelopment, a renaissance, which includes the reorganization of Detroit's priorities. As part of that effort, Detroit's educational institutions need to excel at every level. The urban universities and colleges must help create an atmosphere of learning that can be used for the betterment of the city and all its inhabitants. A consortium emphasizing cooperation rather than competition can help to accomplish this. The variety of urban issues that must be faced daily affects both individuals and the society as a whole. It is necessary to muster the broadest possible social response to deal with them effectively.

Professor Jackson is a faculty member in the Center for the Study of Higher Education in the School of Education. In November 1980, he was elected to Wayne State University's Board of Governors. Before coming to the U-M, he helped organize and served as first president of Wayne County Community College. Before that he was a faculty member at Wayne State University for twelve years.